

# NO PLACE LIKE HOME: an awareness and action resource for youth



## This booklet contains:

- An introduction to homelessness issues
- Background information on Raising the Roof, with examples of community-based programs focused on reducing and preventing homelessness
- Interactive activities designed to get people talking about issues and solutions
- Ideas for taking action on homelessness



This educational package is designed to inspire discussion and action on the causes of homelessness and how we can all play a part in finding solutions. Feel free to adapt these to your group's needs or to use them as a starting point to create your own awareness events. Participants will:

- Gain new insights into community issues such as poverty and homelessness
- Develop critical awareness of issues facing Canadian society
- Assess their own risk for homelessness
- Find ready-made projects for youth leadership and social justice projects



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# Raising the Roof – Who We Are



Raising the Roof/Chez Toit is a registered, national charity dedicated to finding long-term solutions to the growing problem of homelessness in Canada. We are working to establish a country-wide network to fund and partner with local initiatives involving homeless people or people at risk of becoming homeless.

Founded in 1997, Raising the Roof was created as a result of a consultation and feasibility study. Experts from across the country expressed a need for a national organization to facilitate shared strategies to end homelessness. Until then, local organizations worked in relative isolation from one other, and Canadians had few opportunities to learn about, participate in, and support projects that helped to keep people off the streets.

Our mission is to ensure that all people in Canada have a home and the opportunity to participate in their communities as a means to overcoming poverty. We provide opportunities for schools, organizations, corporations, governments and individuals to participate in local solutions for men, women and children who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.

## Specifically, Raising the Roof:

- raises and allocates needed resources and funds to local community-based charities across the country.
- undertakes local and national public education initiatives to heighten community awareness and understanding of the issues surrounding homelessness.
- engages the private and public sectors in the development of a national strategy on the prevention of homelessness, identifying effective approaches and efforts that succeed in reducing homelessness. This includes the development and promotion of innovative programs and useful resources for local communities, as well as the development of a Website to share information and lessons learned.



# What is homelessness and how did it get to be such an issue in Canada?

What comes to mind when students think about homelessness? Is it an image of a shabby-looking person standing on a street asking for money? Or a young person who they think doesn't want to get an education or find a job?

- The long-term or “**chronically**” **homeless** person – the individuals we tend to see on our streets – represents less than 20% of the homeless population.
- The remaining **80%** of the homeless population are **families and individuals** who find themselves without a place to live for a period of time.
- The “**hidden homeless**” are those living in cars and motels, bunking in with friends and families or getting by in other temporary accommodation.
- **800,000 Canadian families** – 20% of all renters – spend more than 50% of their income on rent and are therefore at risk of losing their housing.
- In Toronto alone, more than **61,899 households**, representing over 150,000 people, are on the **waiting list for social housing**.
- The longer someone is homeless, the greater the risk of **long-term physical or emotional harm** and the greater the cost to society.

Homelessness is a complex problem, and people have different ideas about how and why people become homeless, and the possible solutions to this social and economic crisis. Below are some common questions, with excerpts from information you'll find on Raising the Roof's Website. For more questions and answers, check out the site.

## What is homelessness?

Homelessness should be easy enough to define. It is the absence of a place to live (a house or apartment or room – the physical structure), which includes the absence of belonging to a place and the people living there (a home, in the social or psychological sense). A person who has no regular place to live stays in an overnight emergency shelter, an abandoned building, an all-night coffee shop or theatre, a car, outdoors, or other such places not meant to be living spaces.

For a variety of different reasons, large numbers of people are now finding themselves “dehoused”, not necessarily out on the streets, but without a place of their own for a short period of time. Some drift in and out of temporary housing situations, and some remaining unhoused for long periods of time. They once had housing. They once had enough money to get by. They once had a support network of family and friends in combination with a public “social safety net.” This private/public support network meant they were housed, they were able to look after their health and general well-being, and they had a place to call home.

One useful definition of “homelessness” has been proposed by Sabine Springer, a researcher at the United Nations (UN) Centre for Human Settlements. The U.N. is starting to use the term “houselessness” instead of “homeless”. It refers to the one crucial factor all homeless people have in common: lack of shelter.

Also, we need to recognize that there are many Canadians who are inadequately housed, living in places that are unsafe or unhealthy, or simply that are temporary. Most of the people who become houseless started off being inadequately housed, living in places that are

unsafe or unhealthy, too crowded, or without utilities such as heat or electricity.

## Who is homeless?

People without housing are a diverse, mobile population encompassing many subgroups. Some people without housing have nothing in common but their lack of housing. The unifying factor is having no fixed address, no stable and adequate place to live.

Most people who find themselves in this situation migrate to the centre of larger urban areas where a range of services for people without housing are available. Most wander from place to place and from service to service to ensure their physical survival. The “dehousing” processes operating in society (the lack of affordable housing, rising rents, few vacancies) are producing more and more people who are excluded from mainstream society, struggling to survive without a place to call home.

People without housing are male and female, young and old, families and single people. The characteristics are different in different parts of the country. Among the people without housing are many single men and women, families, visible minorities, aboriginal people, immigrants, young people escaping abuse at home, people with severe mental illnesses and other serious health problems, such as AIDS.

## What is the impact of not having a place to call home?

Having no fixed address means being excluded from all that is associated with having a home, a surrounding neighbourhood and a set of established community networks. Having no fixed address means being exiled from the mainstream pat-

terns of day-to-day life. There are social, emotional and physical affects that can permanently change the way people are viewed – and view – society.

On becoming homeless, people enter a different world from the rest of us. Survival is the main goal. It is a nightmare world completely apart from the normal day-to-day pattern of living.

People who are homeless face an increased risk of contracting infectious disease because they often find themselves in overcrowded, cold, damp and unsanitary conditions. All unhoused people are subject to stress because of the factors that made them homeless and because of the experience of being homeless. Poor diet, stress, cold and dampness along with inadequate sanitation and food storage or preparation facilities all increase the risk of health problems. There is also an increased risk of violence and an increased risk of accidents. Particular areas of concern are the prevalence of tuberculosis, as well as high levels of mental health problems, HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis.

People without housing who avoid emergency shelters and tend to “sleep in the rough” have a health status that is far worse than that of the general population. Research on the average lifespan of people who sleep on the streets of major Western cities has indicated that many men only live until their mid- to late-forties. The prevalence of infection, physical disease, and mental health problems are very high.

### Don't some people choose to be homeless?

Some people who find themselves without housing do choose to avoid using some or all of the emergency shelters because of the rules, the potential for violence or theft. Having few options is not the same as making a choice.

Among the general population, many people make bad choices at some time in their lives. For those on the economic margin, a bad choice can result in becoming unhoused. The alienation and deprivations that accompany life on the streets do not help people learn new and better choices. Sometimes, the effect is just the opposite. However, the overwhelming majority of homeless people want to get off the street and into stable adequate housing.

Most people will never know what it is like to try to survive without housing. Homeless people and community workers list the following as just some of the realities:

- the constant search for temporary shelter;
- inadequate food and nutrition;
- shortage of appropriate clothing;
- sexual victimization; harassment and physical assault;
- inadequate medical services;
- negative or low self-esteem;
- social isolation;
- development of mental health and/or substance abuse problems; and
- poor prospects for employment and appropriate permanent housing.

No one “chooses” this lifestyle.

### What are the solutions?

All homeless people have one thing in common – a lack of housing. The gap between the cost of adequate housing and the income available to pay for it is too large for many individuals and families. Though we can debate what has caused the dramatic increase in the number of people without housing, access to housing is still the first step in dealing with the problem. Until people find a safe, secure, affordable home, and have stability where they live, they cannot achieve stability where they work, where their children go to school and where they find support.

Emergency shelters, daytime drop-in centres and free distribution of sleeping bags and other basic necessities are all vitally important to the day-to-day survival of people who have no housing. As long as there are people without housing, these services will be required. These services, however, are not part of a long term solution to the problem of people not having housing.

National and local strategies must address a range of issues including: preventative measures; rental housing market options; social housing options; adequate social assistance benefits; job training and employment options; effective prevention of discrimination in the housing and job markets; specialized services for people with mental illness, chemical dependencies and other personal problems; and adequate settlement services for newcomers (immigrants, refugees and migrants).

## ICE BREAKERS:

These are dynamic activities in which everyone participates in order to get people to loosen up and feel comfortable in a group. Ice breakers are good for introducing a discussion, or as a “get to know you” activity at the start of a workshop.

## Tableaus

In small groups, discuss a situation in which someone might be homeless. Arrange human “sculptures” to represent a snapshot – a moment in time – that represents the situation. For example, a family is evicted from their home after one of the adults loses his/her job and has to go to a shelter. At the shelter or in the community they may have access to programs such as employment counseling, a rent bank or workshops on resources in the community. Create scenarios representing each of these “steps”. Present these to the larger group and have people participate by guessing the situation, brainstorming how each person feels and/or proposing solutions to the crisis faced by this family.

## Quick construction

With a number of pieces of a structure (either real or model), participants have to create houses in a limited period of time. The materials can be “found” materials others have thrown away or cut-out shapes of roof, door, walls, etc. Idea is that people must cooperate to put the structure together. You can add a few twists such as dividing participants into groups and giving only one group the glue, string or some other essential item. Groups have to trade supplies in order to get the job done.

## Opinions count

Mark a line down the centre of the room. One side is “agree”, the other “disagree” and the center is “no opinion” or “undecided”. A moderator – or group leader – calls out statements and participants move to the spot that represents their opinion of what they hear. You can incorporate myths about homelessness or ideas regarding how to solve the problem. These statements could come from brainstorming sessions or can be invented by the moderator. You might include statements like:

- Housing is a right, like other human rights such as the right to vote, to an education or the right not to be discriminated against.
- There is nothing the average person can do about homelessness.
- Homeless people are lazy and don’t want to work.
- Homelessness agencies need more funds to help prevent people becoming homeless in the first place . . .

There is no right or wrong answer, but in order to encourage discussion, the moderator randomly picks a few people to explain “where they stand” on the issue.

## Home sweet home

Ask students to create, either individually or in small groups, an image of their perfect home (this could take the form of a drawing, mural or model). What are the things people need to have in order to feel safe and secure at home? For example, do people need a place to sit and think quietly on their own? A place to store their possessions? A place to share a meal with family or friends? What happens when people don’t have these?

## Surviving on Social Assistance

### Purpose:

To encourage students to consider how difficult it is for many people to pay for housing in addition to other necessities, and to assist students in devising their own budgeting strategies.

### Background

People on social assistance have always been poorer than the average person but the depth of poverty is getting worse, according to the National Council on Welfare. Particularly after cuts to social

assistance in 1998, many people have found it increasingly difficult to survive on social assistance. The incomes of all welfare households in all provinces are well below the “poverty line”, as measured by Statistics Canada’s low-income cut-offs.

Most of us have experienced cash shortages from time to time. But for many Canadians this is a permanent situation. Imagine what it’s like to decide between paying the rent – knowing that your family could be evicted from your apartment – and buying food for your children. Imagine what it’s like for young people living in low income situations while all around us we are encouraged to buy things and spend money in order to feel important, stylish and popular.

There is no one way to determine who is poor. To give you an idea of how poverty has been measured Statistics Canada conducts an annual survey of family expenditures on food, clothing and shelter. It then takes an average and increases this by 20%. This is the “poverty line”. The idea is that a family that spent significantly more than average on essentials would be in trouble and have little or

no income left to spend on transportation, health, personal care, education, household operation, recreation or insurance. The poverty line is adjusted for the size of the family, and whether people live in a rural or urban area.

Social activists propose a different way to calculate how well families are doing. Called the Quality of Life Index, it takes into account things like levels of environmental pollution, political freedom and government expenditures in areas like education and health. This is measurement at the societal level and is harder to use to compare one family to another.

Income Comparison is another way to measure levels of relative poverty. In Ontario, for example, a single person with one child who is living on social assistance has less than half the income of someone who is employed. Another comparison is to look at what the richest 10% of the population makes compared to the poorest 10%. If the difference is too extreme, that society is said to be inequitable in terms of income distribution and there are many social and political problems that go along with the lack of equality.

Activity:

# Imagine you are a single parent with two children.

There are 13 different welfare systems in Canada, each with complex rules for who qualifies to receive assistance. How much social assistance people receive depends on the makeup of their families and where they live, among other factors.

If you qualified for social assistance in Ontario, you might receive \$1,326.50 each month. Under the categories below, enter how much you would have to spend every month just to provide your family with the basics. Investigate this by

taking a survey of what adults spend monthly on necessities, searching rental and grocery ads in the local paper, and/or checking out consumer report Websites.

Purchase/Pay	\$ spent week 1	\$ spent week 2	\$ spent week 3	\$ spent week 4	Monthly total
Rent					
Food					
Transportation					
Clothes					
Child Care					
Entertainment					
Medicine (include Dentist and eyeglasses)					
Other items:					
Your expenses: totals					

## Discussion

Did you run out of money before you budgeted for all your needs? Are there extra things you would have to buy through the year? What are the options for people who can't afford the basics for their families? What are some of the solutions to the shortfall in income experienced by many people in Canada?

A number of the agencies that Raising the Roof supports offer employment counseling, and workshops in financial management. Workshops on budgeting help people anticipate how they'll be able to use their money wisely. Of course, no amount of planning can change the fact that often there just isn't enough money. However, there are things that people can do to maximize funds, for example:

- shopping at warehouses, discount stores or farmers' markets (note that this often requires transportation to places that are located outside of the center of town)
- going to free community events for entertainment (some museums and galleries have days when admission is free; especially in the summertime there are free outdoor concerts and other events)
- buying items "in bulk" with friends, then dividing up groceries

- buying good-quality used items at garage sales and second hand stores
- bartering goods or services: babysitting, computer skills etc. traded for used furniture someone is looking to sell

The following real life situations are part of a workshop offered by the YWCA Stop 86 Women's Shelter in Toronto. Participants come up with workable solutions to common problems.

### Discuss strategies in small groups:

- You went clothes shopping and spent more money than you could afford. Now you are \$30 short and you can't pay your bills.
- You have paid all your bills and only have \$25 to last you for the next two weeks. You are almost out of groceries and you need to buy gas.

Your car broke down. It will cost you \$200 to fix it. You need your car to get to work, but if you pay the repair bill you won't have enough money for other expenses this month.

### Can you think of other ways to save money?

# ROLES



## **Purpose:**

This activity is designed to bring home the fact that, although life choices play a big part in who we are and what we do in life, there are some situations that people get into through no fault of their own.

## **Background**

At Raising the Roof we emphasize that homelessness is not a choice that people make, but something that can happen to anyone. The tens of thousands of homeless Canadians represent a diverse mix of young and old, families with children, couples and single people. Families with children are the fastest growing group. The long-term or “chronically” homeless person – the individuals we tend to see on our streets – represent less than 20% of the homeless population. The rest are families and individuals who find themselves without a place to live for a period of time. Homelessness can happen to anyone – from a child whose parents suddenly become unemployed, to a teenager escaping an abusive caregiver, to a senior citizen on a fixed income facing a rent or tax increase.

Poverty is at the root of many of the factors contributing to whether or not someone has enough food or a safe, secure place to live. Once someone is in a difficult situation, especially if s/he doesn’t have access to resources or support, it may seem that there is no solution and often the person moves farther along the path to despair and homelessness.

## **Activity**

The following page lists some of the situations that can lead to homelessness. The rate of homelessness or proportion of the population at risk of homelessness is difficult to measure (see the section on Frequently Asked Questions) and can vary from community to community. However, this activity is designed to point out that the person next to you could be at risk through circumstances beyond his or her control.

Photocopy the attached sheet and cut out the “identities”. Mix these up in a box, roll them into straws, etc. Each participant chooses one. Now discuss in the group who is likely to be homeless given his/her situation. What can be done to help? It might be useful for other participants to play the role of people in the community who may have an opportunity or resources to help: doctor/nurse, local politician, staff member at a shelter, police officer, school principal, child care worker, bank manager, landlord, friend or neighbour, social worker, etc.

These “identities”, simplified for the activity, may in fact represent the life situation of some of the participants. Take care to discuss and debrief this activity. If you feel some people may be uncomfortable putting themselves in these specific roles, simply cut out pieces of paper that say “homeless” and “ you have a home”. Put these in a container for participants to draw from. Similarly, use this exercise to stimulate discussion about homelessness being something that can happen to anyone, no matter his or her current lifestyle or level of education.

You have a good job and a safe, secure place to live.

You came to Canada as a refugee to escape a violent civil war. Your parents don't speak English or French very well and are having trouble finding jobs here.

You have a good job and a safe, secure place to live.

You are a single mother of two small children. You don't earn enough to support your family and would like to go back to school in order to get a better job, but you can't afford that either.

You have a good job and a safe, secure place to live.

As a young teenager you ran away from an abusive homelife. Depressed and angry, you started using drugs and you now you don't believe you'll ever have a "normal" life.

You have a good job and a safe, secure place to live.

You are a widower on social assistance. You often borrow money in order to be able to afford your food and heating costs.

You have a good job and a safe, secure place to live.

You had a good job, but got laid off. You have been looking for a new job for a year, your savings are running out and you are worried about how you will be able to support your family.

You have a good job and a safe, secure place to live.

Your family's house burned down in a fire and you lost everything. You live in your sister's basement with your three kids and are trying to find a place of your own, but have no money.

You have a good job and a safe, secure place to live.

You have a disability that means you can't live in many older apartment buildings where the rent is cheaper because you can't use the stairs. The place you have now costs you a huge percentage of each month's income.

You have a good job and a safe, secure place to live.

You have AIDS. You get some help from government health care, but still spend a lot of your own money on medication and home health care. Soon you'll have to cancel the home health care service, or find a cheaper place to live.

You have a good job and a safe, secure place to live.

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**Purpose:**

This activity challenges participants to critically examine how we understand homelessness.

**Activity:**

Monitor the newspaper, television and Internet for stories about homelessness. What point of view is expressed in the stories? Can you detect any bias or any misconceptions about people who are homeless? If the overall impression is negative, write a good news story about someone who has overcome homelessness. Some of the photos in this package were taken by photographer and community advocate Stuart Mair, who used to be homeless and now works to raise awareness of the plight of people on the streets. You can contact local media with the good news story about your group raising money for agencies working on solutions to homelessness.

**Discussion**

How are the homeless depicted? Do they have a voice? Do news stories present solutions to homelessness, or simply deal with the "problem"? How do you define the problem?

# Homelessness in the Media



Stuart Mair was homeless for many years. After surviving mental health problems and overcoming years of substance abuse, he has dedicated himself to educating people about homelessness and poverty through music and photography. He formed the Full Circle Band, a blues band that plays at community events, for homelessness agencies and at fundraisers. The Full Circle Band has just finished recording its first CD, titled "Streets".

Stuart Mair shows the reality of homelessness and poverty through his photos, and, in doing so, breaks down myths around people who are homeless. He took this photo of a Montréal man who has a job working in construction (note the boots) but is homeless anyway because of the lack of affordable housing available. Stuart wants to show the human side of people on the streets, rather than show them as objects of pity or fear.

Our thanks to Stuart for letting Raising the Roof use his photos in our awareness campaigns.

# your awareness event

You may want to invite people to a workshop or fundraiser, publicize an information event, or get the word out about services for homeless youth or youth at risk of becoming homeless. How to do it? First think of your intended audience and how you already have access to them. If you want to invite everyone at the school to an event, announcements, posters and e-mails may be the way to go. If you want to reach people who don't yet know your group, or invite the public at large to an event, you can use community radio and local newspapers to deliver your message.

Publicizing your event – advice from youth organizers:

- Begin as soon as possible (4 – 6 weeks)
- Choose one person to be the media contact and print her/his name on all public service announcements and media releases
- Put together or borrow from another group – a list of local media (newspapers, television, community radio) – preferably with the name of a person who would be the contact for your special event or campaign.
- Advertise where your target group is most likely to be found.

**Public Service Announcements (PSAs)** are short announcements that you send to newspapers, Websites, community calendars and radio stations when you want to advertise an event or campaign. The secret of a good public service announcement is to keep it simple, for example:

*Tobermory High School is holding a food drive to benefit the Local Youth Shelter. Bring a donation of dry food or canned goods to the school December 10 – 14 from 9:00 to 5:00. All donated food goes to the Local Youth Shelter, where your contribution is greatly appreciated. For more information call 905-1111-1111.*

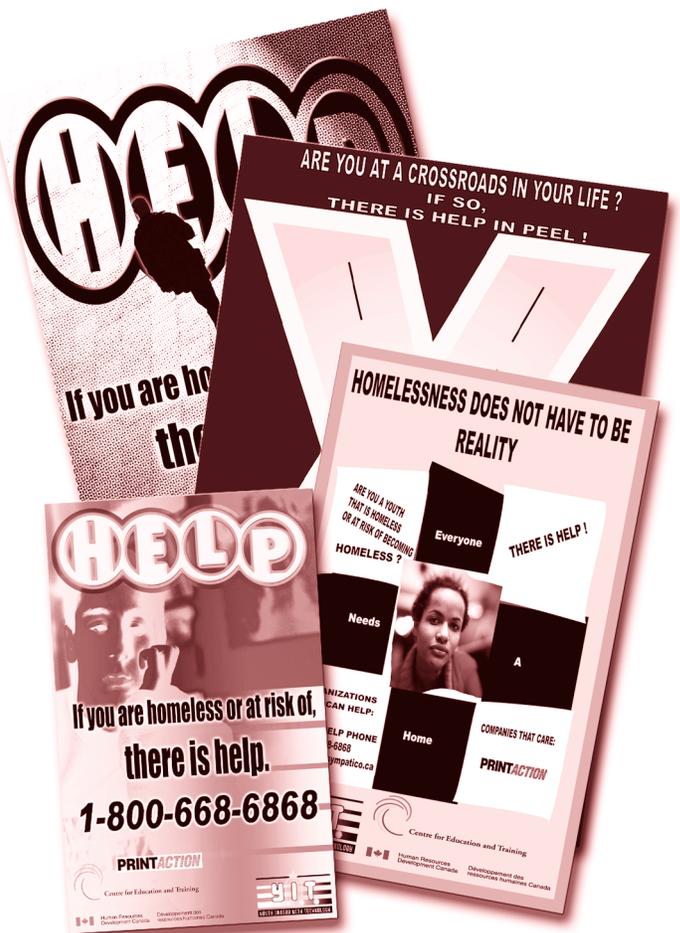
A press release is also short (no more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a page), but gives more information about the five w's: who, what, where, when and why. Some tips:

- Try to head it up with a catchy title or headline
- Try to include a quote, some newspapers will use it word for word
- put “ -30- ” at the bottom – this means you've come to the end of the media release
- Be sure to include the name of your media person and his/her number. This goes below the “ -30- ” mark.

Check out the Canada Newswire Website or other press sites for sample news releases.

## PLAN AN AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

In addition to press releases, there are lots of high-impact visual campaigns. What ads have really “hit” you in the last few years? One of the main ways to get people's attention is with arresting visuals and graphics. A group of youth in Brampton spent the summer learning graphic design, communications, presentation skills and customer service and developed the posters here to help raise awareness of homelessness among youth. This program was funded by Human Resources and Development Canada, which has an interesting Website with all kinds of information on agencies and programs addressing homelessness.



## For your group's event:

Design a series of posters or flyers that build interest in your event, or spread the word about volunteer opportunities or prevention programs for youth. Raising the Roof supplies posters for its annual Toque Campaign to help groups selling toques promote their activities.

# solutions in action



The causes of homelessness are complex. But there are many successful community initiatives that are providing the basis of long-term solutions for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

These solutions range from longer-term solutions like job search assistance, life skills training, rent banks, community economic development programs, substance abuse treatment, and physical and mental health care, to practical supports like provision of shelter, and innovative models of transitional and permanent affordable housing for people who would otherwise be on the streets.

Raising the Roof supports community initiatives that provide people with information, resources, services, programs, and projects that help them move from homelessness and hostel to home, and that help people at risk of losing their housing to stabilize their lives and stay off the path to homelessness.

Read some of their stories.

## **More than just emergency shelter YWCA Stop 86, Toronto**

Many shelters and the agencies that provide emergency services have added support services that move well beyond emergency survival. Operated by the YWCA of Greater Toronto, Stop 86 serves young homeless women aged 16 – 25. Each year, approximately 600 girls and young women go there for help with problems such as violence, sexual abuse, mental health disorders, substance abuse, poverty and neglect.

Stop 86 provides more than just shelter. Stop 86's After-shelter Parenting Support Group, for example, works to meet the sizable and unique needs of the many young single mothers who walk through the shelter's doors. With the support of staff, volunteers and their peers, these young mothers learn



parenting and life skills. Stop 86 helps them find and maintain affordable housing, get employment training and education, and access the supports they need.

## **Supports help people stay housed Housing Support Centre, MNPHA, Halifax**

While access to housing is still the first step in dealing with homelessness, it's true that sometimes people who find a good place to live need help in order to stay housed. A range of housing support services can greatly help people stabilize their lives and reduce their risk of becoming homeless again.

One of Raising the Roof's partners in Halifax, the Metro Non-Profit Housing Association is a charitable organization that provides permanent, secure housing within a supportive living environment to low-income single individuals. Known locally as "The Coffee Shop," MNPHA's Housing Support Centre provides a safe environment for people to find assistance with their housing, financial and health issues, or simply to meet up with friends or participate in activities such as the Shining Lights Choir.



### **Homeless people develop their own solutions Youth Launch, Montreal City Mission, Montreal**

Youth Launch is a program created by the Montreal City Mission in 1999 to respond to the growing needs of street youth in Montreal. As part of the project, street youth were hired to develop and implement services to reach and support their peers on the street – all the while gaining leadership, self-esteem and job skills in Youth Launch’s flexible and supportive environment.

Raising the Roof support has helped Youth Launch accomplish a number of activities, including the production of a newspaper for street youth, an art show, and participation in a forum for street youth at the Université du Québec à Montréal .

Participant Véronique found in Youth Launch a way to use her artistic talent, to share her work with the public, and to provide leadership on the team by helping train new staff, fund-raise and organize projects. Asked how her participation in Youth Launch made a difference in her life, she says: “You have to get up in the morning. If I didn’t have to, I’d get up at five in the afternoon, like before. You know, when you have nothing useful or constructive to do and not a damned penny in your pockets, you relax and take it easy. Instead of getting in trouble, you just stay in bed. But now, it’s different.” Véronique left the project with a much greater sense of self-esteem and direction in her life, in addition to some excellent work experience.

### **Integrated treatment, employment and coping supports St. James Community Service Society, Vancouver**

Men, women and youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless need support services. Some need help with mental health problems, some to overcome substance abuse, and some to simply recover from a long period of being houseless. The St. James Community Service Society’s Community Outreach Program provides counseling and treatment services as part of the range of vocational, educational and coping supports it offers to people who are homeless and in crisis in Vancouver.

Raising the Roof support has enabled St. James to hire a youth outreach worker to be available to young people at night and on the weekends. “Eric found his life changing when he received support from our outreach worker,” recounts a St. James youth worker, “A drug-free lifestyle was encouraged. His job skills were assessed. A résumé followed and so did a part-time job. Eric has moved forward in his life and opened the door to another youth on the road to self-sufficiency.”

***By 2003 Raising the Roof will have allocated more than \$750,000 to agencies working to alleviate and prevent homelessness. Log onto our Website at [www.raisingtheroof.org](http://www.raisingtheroof.org) for more profiles of agencies and for information on contacting an agency in your community.***

# There's No Place Like Home: Everyone should have a place to call home.



All homeless people have one thing in common – a lack of housing. The gap between the cost of adequate housing and the income available to pay for it is too large for many individuals and families. Though we can debate what has caused the dramatic increase in the number of people without housing, access to housing is still the first step in dealing with the problem. Until people find a safe, secure, affordable home, and have stability where they live, they cannot achieve stability where they work, where their children go to school and where they find support.

There are three components to addressing homelessness:

- All Canadians require adequate, affordable housing.
- All need enough money to live on (jobs, job training, adequate income).
- Some men, women and youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless need support services – some for health and mental health problems, some to overcome substance abuse, and some to simply recover from a long period of being houseless.

These practical supports include job search assistance, substance abuse treatment, housing support services, job training, education, physical and mental health care, and the provision of shelter tied to transitional and permanent affordable housing for people who would otherwise be on the streets.

To check out the stories on our Website for examples of these types of community-based solutions in action, go to the “Community Partners” section of “About Us” at [www.raisingtheroof.org](http://www.raisingtheroof.org). Prevention is a key part of the solution. And, we must have a national strategy to address and prevent homelessness, accompanied by local strategies which complement and implement the national approach.

Each community is different in terms of how the local housing, employment and real estate markets work, and the nature of the municipal and provincial services and regulations. How and why people become unhoused can be identified and a range of preventative measures can be instituted to prevent further dehousing.

We must have a national strategy to address and prevent the problem of any Canadians finding themselves without a place to live. We must also have local strategies which complement and implement the national strategy.

Raising the Roof fosters the involvement of governments, businesses, community and faith groups, service providers and homeless people to work on developing national strategies to address homelessness and implement the specific solutions that will help end homelessness in Canada. As part of this mandate, we are dedicated to funding and working with community-based agencies with experience in developing local solutions for people who find themselves unable to afford the basic necessity of a place to call home.

# get involved!

- Invite a speaker from a local agency to talk to your school or community group about homelessness in your community and the work of the agency;
- To call attention to your awareness campaign, arrange to use a large common area and create a structure of "found" materials (garbage, cast off building supplies, etc.). While this will never come close to allowing people to actually experience what it's like to be homeless, it may make them stop and think about how incredible it is that people are living in tents and cardboard boxes in a country as wealthy as Canada;
- For many people, the sense of having a home is what grounds them in life and makes their involvement in the community possible. If you plan to have an event to launch or wrap-up a community fundraiser, ask students or community members who are gifted writers/musicians/actors/artists to prepare presentations on the theme of "home" and "homeless" and what that means in a very real and defining sense for people;
- Every year from December through February, school groups, faith-based organizations and businesses across Canada sell Raising the Roof toques to raise money for local agencies working to reduce and prevent homelessness. We have produced a kit with ideas on organizing, advertising and running your own Toque Campaign. Check out Raising the Roof's Website at [www.raisingtheroof.org](http://www.raisingtheroof.org) or contact us for more information on how your school or youth group can get involved in a fun, dynamic campaign and join groups across the country who are making a difference at the local level.
- Programs such as Bridges for Youth, located in Toronto, offer opportunities for homeless youth to tell their stories to other young people. Your youth group or school can arrange to have a presentation by a young person who has lived on the street, building empathy and insight into what leads someone to become homeless. Contact Bridges for Youth at 416-963-0008, or look for a youth-focused agency in your community.

## Find out more:

Go on line and check out the information on programs that are working to reduce and prevent homelessness. Raising the Roof has a database of agencies in communities across Canada on our Website at [www.raisingtheroof.org](http://www.raisingtheroof.org).

You'll find additional links to information and community groups working to address homelessness in this section. You can search by program or place and find details about successful community-based initiatives from across the country.